

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: State of Montana Board of Land Commissioners
%Trust Lands Management Division
PO Box 201601
Helena, MT 59620-1601
2. Type of action: Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit 76N 30106284
3. Water source name: Thompson River
4. Location affected by project: The Applicant is proposing to divert water from the following locations:

POD/POU ID#	POD/POU Location	Diversion Type	Access Type
1	NESWNE Section 8, Township 25N, Range 26W, Flathead County	Bucket/Pump	County Road
2	W2 Section 32, Township 27N, Range 27W, Lincoln County	Bucket	Air (Helicopter only)
3	N2 Section 10, Township 26N, Range 27W, Lincoln County	Bucket	Air (Helicopter only)
4	S2 Section 11, Township 26N, Range 27W, Lincoln County	Bucket	Air (Helicopter only)
5	SENESE Section 18, Township 25N, Range 26W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Plum Creek Access Agreement
6	SESWNW Section 23, Township 25N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	County Road
7	SESESE Section 26, Township 25N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
8	NWNWNW Section 36, Township 25N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
9	NWSESE Section 36, Township 25N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands

10	NWSENW Section 26, Township 24N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
11	NWSWSW Section 36, Township 24N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
12	SESWSW Section 36, Township 24N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
13	NWNENE Section 12, Township 23N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
14	SESWSW Section 6, Township 23N, Range 26W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
15	SENWNW Section 7, Township 23N, Range 26W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	County Road
16	SESESE Section 14, Township 23N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
17	SWNWNW Section 24, Township 23N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
18	NENWNW Section 26, Township 23N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
19	SWNWNE Section 34, Township 23N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands
20	NWSESW Section 32, Township 23N, Range 27W, Sanders County	Bucket/Pump	Trust Lands

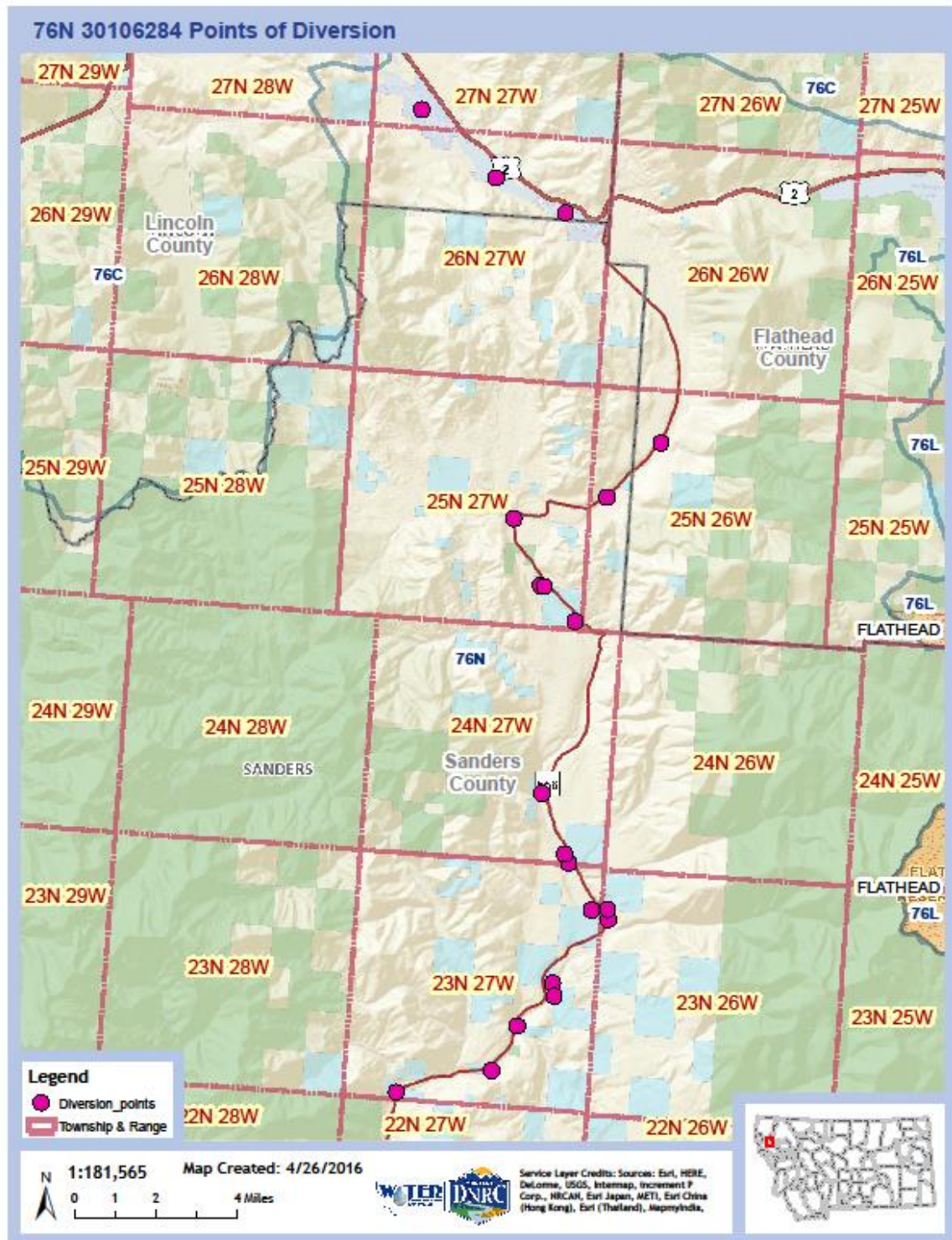
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:

The Applicant is proposing to divert water from the Thompson River to be used for fire training purposes by fire crews. The Applicant intends to divert water using a Helicopter with a 350 gallon capacity bucket as well as onboard pumps of wildland fire engines and tenders. The proposed appropriation is 350 gallons per minute (GPM) up to 0.15 acre-feet (AF) per year. Due to the nature of the fire training use, water may be trucked to a training site on State Trust Lands. Because water use is not tied to a specific parcel and the water use relies on helicopters, fire engines, and tenders taking possession of the water at the point of diversion, the places of use for this application are considered to be the same as the points of diversion. The Applicant has legal access to all points of diversion requested.

The DNRC shall issue a water use permit if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (DFWP)

Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Montana Natural Heritage Program



Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity - *Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.*

Determination: No significant impact

The source of supply is the Thompson River which has not been identified as chronically or periodically dewatered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks. The proposed appropriation is for 350 GPM up to 0.15 AF per year from the Thompson River; this flow and volume has been determined to be both physically and legally available from the source.

Water quality - *Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.*

Determination: No significant impact

The Thompson River has been assessed for beneficial uses by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ); it is identified by DEQ as fully supporting all beneficial uses. It is not anticipated that the Applicant's proposed pumping out of the Thompson River system will have any impacts on water quality of the source.

Groundwater - *Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.*

Determination: No significant impact

The proposed appropriation is for surface water.

DIVERSION WORKS - *Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.*

Determination: No significant impact

The means of diversion is a bucket suspended under a helicopter or a pump mounted on wildland fire engines or tenders. The proposed points of diversion are at county bridge crossings, on School Trust Lands, or on Plum Creek bridge crossings; no construction of diversion works will be required. There should be no channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian area disturbances, dams, or well construction associated with the proposed appropriation.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any “species of special concern,” or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or “species of special concern.”*

Determination: No significant impact

The proposed points of diversion are located throughout the Thompson River system, encompassing parts of Lincoln, Flathead, and Sanders Counties. Each proposed point of diversion consists of an already established access point to the Thompson River. The Thompson River provides suitable habitat for Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout. Additionally, FWP surveys show the Western Pearlshell mussel to be present in the Thompson River. There were no plant species identified as “threatened” or “endangered” within the project area. The maximum requested flow rate requested is 350 GPM and maximum volume is 0.15 AF. It is not anticipated that the proposed appropriation will have an impact on the identified species.

Wetlands - *Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.*

Determination: No significant impact

The Applicant intends to divert up to 350 GPM and 0.15 AF of water from established access sites; no construction of access points will be required. Therefore, the proposed appropriation should have no significant impact on wetlands.

Ponds - *For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.*

Determination: No significant impact

There are no ponds associated with this project.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - *Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.*

Determination: No significant impact

The proposed beneficial use of this application is fire training and water will be diverted at existing access sites on the Thompson River. There should be no impacts on soils associated with the proposed appropriation.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - *Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.*

Determination: No significant impact

This project will not impact existing vegetative cover and it is not anticipated that issuance of a water use permit will contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the project area.

AIR QUALITY - *Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.*

Determination: No significant impact

There will be no impact to air quality associated with issuance of a water use permit.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.*

Determination: No significant impact

The proposed points of diversion and places of use are at established access sites along the Thompson River. There will be no new construction or modification of access sites along the river. Issuance of a water use permit would not have any impact on any historical or archeological sites.

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.*

Determination: No other potential impacts have been identified.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

Determination: No known environmental plans or goals will be impacted by this project.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

Determination: No access or recreational activities will be significantly impacted by this project. With the multiple points of diversion requested, the Applicant has the ability to choose which locations will have the least impact on people recreating in the general area.

HUMAN HEALTH - Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.

Determination: This proposed project will have no significant impact on human health.

PRIVATE PROPERTY - Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.

Yes___ No X If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

Determination: No regulatory impacts are known.

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impacts identified
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impacts identified
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impacts identified
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impacts identified
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impacts identified
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impacts identified
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impacts identified
- (h) Utilities? No significant impacts identified
- (i) Transportation? No significant impacts identified
- (j) Safety? No significant impacts identified
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impacts identified

2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:

Secondary Impacts No significant impacts identified

Cumulative Impacts No significant impacts identified

3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures: None

4. *Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:*

The only alternative to the proposed action would be the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not permit the applicant to withdraw water from the Thompson River for fire training.

PART III. Conclusion

1. *Preferred Alternative*

Issue a water use permit if the Applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

2 *Comments and Responses*

None

3. *Finding:*

Yes___ No **X** *Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?*

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

No significant impacts related to the proposed project have been identified.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Nathaniel T. Ward

Title: Water Resource Specialist

Date: May 2, 2016